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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to find out from learners how they actually direct their own language learning in a variety of social settings. In this study, self direction includes the phenomena represented by the terms "conscious learning strategies," either a focused approach or a general strategy, and "self directed learning," in distinction from collaborative and institutional learning. The data were derived from interviews with 25 adult learners who had lived in the United States for no longer than 2 years. They were asked to fill out a grid of social settings in which they usually found themselves and the language they used in each one. The interview required that they reflect upon language experiences in these social situations. Analysis of the data revealed that these adults directed their own learning by engaging in the following assessments and action decisions: coping, designating, discriminating, evaluating, planning, self analyzing, and theorizing. Each of these processes is illustrated and defined by referring to the experiences of four of the learners; these definitions are amplified by reference to the self reports of all the interviewees. Interview questions, profiles of the four learners mentioned above, the interview schedule, and tables of processes and outcomes are appended. (AMH)

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Lewis (1948) says of the adult learner of a second language:

> ...the adult learner, however uninstructed he may be, has thought about words and their meanings and the business of communication. And in learning a second language, the adult student almost inevitably thinks about what he is doing and reflects on the nature of the process.

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Lewis points out one of the important characteristics of adult learners: they are conscious of what they are learning and are able to reflect upon their learning process. It is this characteristic that makes it possible for them to intervene consciously in their learning--what the late Ruth Crymes referred to as "the processes of intervention" (Crymes 1980:8). The advice of linguists and language teachers to learners who find themselves in an immersion situation with little or no knowledge of the language (Nida 1957, Politzer 1965, Kraft and Kraft 1966, Pike 1969, Hall 1973, Stern 1980) attests to a longstanding belief in the importance (if relatively untested effectiveness) of conscious learner intervention. However, it is only recently that research in second language learning has begun to document learning strategies (Naiman, Frohlich and Stern 1975, Tran Thi Chau 1975, Abby Thomas 1976, Hosenfeld 1976,1977,1979, Wesche

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1979, Bialystok 1979, Aphek and Cohen 1979,1980, Beebe 1980, Rubin 1975,1981, Rubin and Henze 1981, Stevick 1981) and communication strategies (see Larsen- Freeman 1981 for a review of the literature), two concepts that refer to the processes of intervention.

As they are described by the researchers cited above, strategies have two distinct meanings. They refer, first of all, to pedagogical tasks (my term) learners perform in response to a learning or communication need. These strategies are focused. They may be observable as when learners ask a question or write something down OR unobservable as when learners compare or make associations. Learning strategies may also refer to characteristics of learners' overall approach to language learning as when learners are described as taking an active approach to language learning, or as being risk takers. Strategies, in this sense, indicate how learners respond to the task of language learning in general terms.[1]

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[1] For other definitions and/or a more detailed discussion of the term "strategy" see Faerch and Kasper 1980, Naiman, Frohlich and Stern 1975, Seliger 1981, Tarone 1980,1981.

(In subsequent references to the term "strategy", I will indicate the distinction between the two by writing strategy(s) when it refers to a focused task and strategy(S) when it refers to a general characteristic of a learners' approach.)

Self directed learning, another concept that refers

Smith (1976) distinguishes self directed learning from collaborative learning and institutional learning on the basis of the locus of the decision making regarding the organization of the learning. Thus, learners can be primarily responsible for the organization and direction of their learning (self directed learning). Otherwise, learners can plan with members of their learning group (collaborative learning); or the institution can make the major decisions (institutional learning).

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to the processes of intervention, has received considerable attention from practitioners and researchers in adult education (Knowles 1975, Houle 1960, Kidd 1973, Tough 1971,1978, Guglielmo 1977, Penland 1977, Galosy 1978, Giffel 1976, Kratz 1978).

According to these practitioners and researchers, the skills of self directed learning include the ability to assess learning needs, set goals, design and implement learning plans--including the choice and exploitation of resources--and evaluate progress and the outcome of learning. The research in this area has documented learners' planning tasks, the content of their learning, and some of the factors that may influence a learner's choice of self directed learning. None of the groups studied, however, were adult language learners.

Research in self directed learning that has focused on the adult language learner has tested the workability of learning schemes to train learners to self direct their language learning (Abe Henner-Stanchina and Smith 1975, Henner-Stanchina 1976, Henner-Stanchina and Holec 1977, Moulden 1978-80). Results of projects conducted between 1975 and 1980 have indicated the effectiveness of the training in terms of learner attitudes, number of drop outs, and productivity of learning. (Allright 1980 describes a project to train learners to manage their learning with similar goals.) To my knowledge, no systematic attempt has been made thus far to find out from learners how they actually self direct their language learning in a variety of social settings. In other words, there has been no research that has analysed learner self reports to discover how learners consciously intervene in

their learning other than the studies on learning and communication strategies(Ss) referred to above.[3]

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[3]It is true that the diary studies (e.g. Schumann and Schumann 1977, Jones 1977, Rivers 1979, Rubin 1981) are a rich source of information on the processes of intervention. However, except for Rubin's studies, these have been undertaken, primarily, to gain insight on the social and psychological variables that influence language acquisition.

In this paper, I would like to report upon the results of a study I completed to discover and describe how adults represent their endeavors to self direct their learning of English in a variety of social settings. The findings are based on the self reports of 25 learners. Self direction, as I intended it, included the phenomena represented by the terms, "conscious learning strategies(s)" and "self directed learning", as explained in the preceding passages. However, it was also my intention to discover whether these two concepts represented the totality of learners' conscious enterprises.

A group of 25 learners who had lived in the US for no longer than two years and who were enrolled part time in the advanced level classes of a university based language program were selected and interviewed. A few days before the interview, interviewees were given a list of questions outlining the general areas that would be covered during the interview (Appendix A) and asked to complete a Grid of Daily Activities (Appendix B). The grid indicated the social settings in which they usually found themselves during a typical week and the language they used in each one. The questions that formed the main body of the interview (Appendix C) required students to engage in a form of delayed retrospection--they reflected upon and talked about language learning experiences that had occurred some time before the interview. (See Cohen and Hosenfeld 1981 for an explanation of the difference between delayed retrospection and immediate retrospection.) Their observations were focused upon the resources in the social settings they had listed on their grid of daily activities (e.g. a TV program they watched or friends they talked to). The interview schedule was semi-structured. Once the questions had pointed the interviewees in a general direction, every attempt was made to let them take the lead while I probed for clarification and [illegible]cification of what was being said. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed in rough detail. Analysis of the data revealed that learners self

direct their learning by engaging in the following seven processes--coping, designating, discriminating, evaluating, planning, self analysing, theorizing.

Studies by Cohen and Robbins 1976, Schachter, Tyson and Diffley 1976, Cohen et al 1979, Arthur 1980 have documented learner interventions similar to designating and discriminating although they have not described their findings in these terms.

These processes will be illustrated and defined by referring to the experiences of four of the learners interviewed, MG, EJ, LS, and CD. (See appendix D for a profile of each learner.) The definitions, however, are based on the self reports of the 25 learners--although they did not necessarily all refer to engaging in each process to the same extent and in exactly the same way.

COPING

When learners indicate that they have become aware of the need to communicate in their second language or to learn something about it and so, decide upon and perform a task to respond to this need, I say they are coping.

Learners cope when they need to express themselves . MG explains how he managed when talking with a family with whom he lived during a summer he spent in Britain. "I tried to build a logical answer using words the landlord had used....I used many explanations and drawings."

EJ tells what she does when talking with American friends. "Sometimes they do not understand. I try to say it again....I ask for help."

In other cases, they need to understand what they hear or read. MG describes the tasks he performed to help himself understand the paper.

> I read the papers every day; I used pictures and headlines (to understand);....I read the news about Spain; I found the meaning of the sentence by looking at the verbs.

EJ talks about how she understood the stories she read in grammar books. "When I read a sentence, I try to catch the meaning of the grammar first."

Learners may also become aware of the need to learn a grammar structure, a new item of vocabulary, or to learn to think in their second language. MG tells how he tried to learn the question form correctly--a structure he had been having difficulty mastering.

> I noticed how the landlord asked 'did you go to school this morning ?' I remembered what

> I had learned it school. Then I began to ask questions; I used it continuously.

EJ explains how she learned expressions such as "you're welcome," "you betcha"; "no big deal"..In the second example, she tells what she did to learn to think in English--to stop translating everything.

> I tried to remember....I asked what it meant; they explained; I tried to use it.(At first it was strange.) I used it two or three times, and it became my word.

> At first, I tried to translate every word. Now, I don't...I didn't do anything to stop. I just did not read Korean books at home and tried to see everything in English.

Finally, learners also try to profit from having their errors pointed out to them. MG tells how he did this while participating in a seminar at a California university. "...but sometimes, I think or I repeat and try to do better next time."

EJ describes how she learned the meaning of the word "notice".

> My friend asked me why I used 'notice'; I realize I made a mistake; I compare with my meaning...I still don't understand exactly...I keep the word

in my mind and ask an American.

Coping, therefore, refers to the process whereby learners decide upon and perform tasks to (1) to improve their communication skills--to understand and express themselves in their second language; (2) to acquire various items of the linguistic system--as when they try to learn a word, structure, or sound they have just encountered or used inappropriately; (3) to try to think in their second language.

DESIGNATING

When learners refer to having become aware of the language and are asking themselves how it works, I say they are designating.

LS refers to "discovering" and "recognizing" grammatical rules he had already studied while reading. "...when I read, I discovered grammatical rules...I realized that I dealt with it formally; I recognized this rule though I didn't use it."

EJ notes the difference between American and British pronunciation in describing the difficulties she had understanding videotapes of American dramas.

> I took a course in listening....I couldn't understand...pronunciation was different.

> (I had learned British pronunciation.)
> British pronunciation is different from
> American pronunciation.

CD notices how different social settings dictate the type of language used and refers to the importance of using colloquial expressions.

> Now I'm in direct contact with language as it is spoken by native speakers...not in a classroom. There are many constructions that I don't know that I learn...Cause it's colloquial language and if you don't use it, they'll ask you what you're talking about.

EJ indicates the relationship between topic and complexity of structure. "...they don't use complicated sentences in speaking of everyday life topics."

Finally, LS refers to the function of language.

> A language is a form to express our ideas, thoughts and feelings. A form can't change an inner self...language has only a function--to express our inner life.

Designating, therefore, refers to learners' assessments about the language. Based on notions about language acquired through their classroom experiences or on their own original perceptions, these assessments vary in sophistication. In some cases, learners simply

recognize some aspect of the language they have previously studied. In others, however, they refer to more perceptive insights (e.g the relationship between language and social setting) about the nature of both the linguistic and sociolinguistic codes and the function of the language.

DISCRIMINATING

When learners discriminate, they are attending to the way they communicate in their second language, i.e.to their performance, and they are asking themselves how they are doing.

CD describes the communication problems she faces while participating in a seminar in social work at a local university. At the time, she was also enrolled in a language program.

> I could understand the meaning when they talked, (she had already studied the material in Portuguese) but I was not able to speak, only 'I agree I disagree'....it was better when I read.

MG describes how difficult it is to use expressions he may learn while reading the newspaper. "I can't always use the expressions I learn (while reading a newspaper) in a conversation. But they help me understand the paper more and more."

Learners may also discriminate about their progress or lack of it.

LS refers to the fact that he is not making as much progress as he wishes and feels it will take ten years to acquire the language. "It doesn't go fast unfortunately."

CD decides she is regressing, partly because of the tendency of the woman with whom she was living to correct everything she said. "She only made me regress further."

EJ and MG explain how they knew they had made an error. "Americans say 'no' when they don't understand...sometimes, I can tell by their faces."(EJ) "Other times I'm corrected and I notice my errors."(MG)

Discriminating, therefore, refers to learners' assessments about how they speak, read, and understand their second language, i.e. their performance. These assessments refer to how well or how poorly they do so. Learners are also discriminating when they determine whether they have made progress, regressed, or reached a plateau in learning. A final instance of discriminating

occurs when learners assess their performance by judging its impact upon the people with whom they speak. Impact is determined through the feedback they receive from these people.

EVALUATING

When learners evaluate, they are attending to the outcome of a particular learning activity and asking themselves whether or not they have learned or improved their skills.

MG assesses the value of living with a family. "...the best way...if you're accepted as part of the family and don't live with other students."

EJ judges the value of studying for a TOEFL test and then refers to an earlier attempt to take a comprehension course. "Maybe this (studying for the TOEFL) helped unconsciously.... I only stayed with it (the comprehension course) a month, so I didn't learn."

In the third example, CD specifies what she got out of seminar dicussions. "I learned to understand the language; I saw how they spoke and I started to learn technical words I would need."

When learners evaluate, therefore, they assess the outcome of a learning experience. Either they indicate simply whether or not they learned, or they specify what they learned. In other cases, they may express uncertainty about the outcome or describe the experience so as to indicate its usefulness.

PLANNING

When learners plan, they are looking into the future at their desired level of linguistic competence and asking themselves what they want to learn and how they intend to do so.

EJ indicates that she took the TOEFL test to learn grammar and vocabulary. "I decided to take the TOEFL test as a way of pushing myself to learn grammar and vocabulary."

LS states his objectives in studying grammar books on his own. "I didn't do the exercises. (I was impatient); in a short time I wanted to learn a very large quantity of knowledge."

When asked about what she paid attention to during the seminar discussions in social work she audited, CD refers to her language goals. "My goal was learning and understanding English, so I was interested in how they

spoke. I already knew the concepts."

Finally, MG refers to his decision to leave a language school and enroll in university courses.

> I decided to go to University to meet classmates and discuss with them because in a language school you only meet foreigners....(I wanted) to study in English to learn in English.

When learners plan, therefore, they are deciding about goals and resources. These goals may be quite general (e.g., to learn English) or more specified (e.g. to learn grammar). In some cases, the final decision refers only to a linguistic goal without specifying the means of achieving it; in others the means of achieving the goal is specified, and in other cases, still, learners refers only to an activity they plan to engage in, their implicit goal being to learn English.

SELF ANALYSING

When learners self analyse, they are looking at themselves and asking how they are responsible for various aspects of their language learning and how they are being influenced by the learning experience.

CD explains how she reacted to a roommate who tried to correct her every mistake. Then, she refers to a language class she found "hard" partly because of her age and because she had been a professor herself.

> I became angry....I felt depressed and thought I would never learn...in the end I wanted to move out; this woman didn't understand what it meant to learn a language.
>
> (How did you feel about being in the class ?) Hard. I used to be a professor...everyone was young, as young as my daughter; they wanted to have a party every week; they were not worried about the necessity of learning. I was.

LS explains how his "personality" makes it difficult for him to express himself. In the next example, he describes his conflicting reactions to interacting with work colleagues whom he had asked to correct him (and who did).

> (Referring to when he first came)..I was very embarassed. But I didn't change too much now. Sometime, I don't have the courage to speak or have the confidence. I don't know why. Maybe it's because of my personality.
>
> (Do you have good feelings about that situation

> with your friends ?)...good and bad. Good because I learned. By that I became aware of my mistakes. That's not a good feeling to know how little I know....frustrating...(but) it gave me power, it gave me energy to get over these difficulties; at the same time, it was despairing how much I have to learn..

Finally, he refers to how he is inclined to learn, i.e. his learning style. "I'm always open. I'm ready to accept any information about the language. It's my strong inclination to learn this way."

EJ explains how sometimes she doesn't understand while watching two of her favorite TV programs (Merv Griffin Show and the evening news), "...if I'm tired I don't get the meaning." Later she gives her reasons for planning to continue studying English in a formal program. "My husband is studying. I must study to understand him....If I don't study there will be trouble."

Self analysing, therefore, refers to learners' assessments about how they are responsible for various aspects of their learning and how they are affected by it. These assessments may refer to their social roles and their personalities. In referring to their social roles, learners indicate how the responsibilities, goals and expectations these roles entail impede upon or contribute

to their language learning. Focusing upon themselves as personalities, learners note how their particular character, age, physical state,learning style and language aptitude affect their learning and how they (sense of identity, feelings) have been influenced by their learning situation.

THEORIZING

When learners theorize, they are attending to the process of language learning and asking themselves what language learning is like and what should be done to facilitate the process. For CD it is a gradual process.

> I think it was a process...at first I didn't know how to relate what I was learning in class to my life. After a while I could connect my life to my English class.... Now I know more ENglish so I know my problems. Before I knew there was something wrong but couldn't tell what...it's a process.

For MG and EJ the process is unconscious. MG indicates how the information about language received from TV, radio, advertisements, which helped him improve, was absorbed "...unconsciously for everyone and also for me...."

EJ refers to how she eventually stopped translating from Korean to English. "(Now I don't translate. My English has improved.) ..it happened unconsciously. I didn't do anything to stop."

CD explains how the learning process may cause one to undergo certain identity changes.

> My theory was similar to the theory I had when working with adults. I felt they became like children when they're in school..adults regress and become like children. I decided when it happened to me I wouldn't worry about it, but it wasn't easy.

In response to a question regarding whether or not he learned when going shopping, taking subways and other such routine experiences of daily life, LS responded with his "theory" or approach to language learning. One must approach it with intensity--taking advantage of all opportunities to learn.

> Whenever I didn't understand anything, I asked, I inquired and they explained. I was not ashamed to ask. That was the main point....This is the only way to learn to ask always.

For EJ language learning should be approached systematically ,"one must study step by step" with special emphasis being placed on certain skills. " ...learning grammar is fundamental... Grammar background is important to learn....vocabulary is also important..." In reflecting on the difficulty she had reading English periodicals she says, "I realized it was important to learn grammar and vocabulary first ...it was the turning point."

Unlike EJ, MG learns English the "natural way". In the example below he refers to his stay in England when he was just beginning to learn the language.

> I enjoyed the TV programs, tried to understand the landlord...everything was natural...I didn't look at the grammar as a grammatical problem..I tried to catch the meaning. [When in a restaurant] I look at the menu..I need to order, so you learn words that way ....talk, talk as long as there is conversation; one uses words...[is] deep in a subject; ....your partner speaks to you and so stimulates the use of more specific words.

For CD, emotional stimulation is important--an insight she shares after describing regular conversations with a social work colleague she found helpful.

> I think one problem for me and perhaps for everyone learning a language, you have to be

> stimulated to learn...I'm aware I can't speak fluently, yet if people keep saying you should do better...I think the emotional aspect is very important...

Theorizing, therefore, refers to learners' assessments about the nature of language learning and the best way to approach it. In referring to the nature of language learning, learners note that it is (1) a gradual and unconscious process (2) that may cause one to undergo identity changes. Learners comments regarding the best way to approach language learning may be summarized in terms of the following four principles. (1) Intensity-every opportunity should be taken to use or learn the language. (2) Systematicity-certain skills and linguistic items are basic and should be learned first. (3) Naturalness-one learns English while using English in natural contexts. (4) Emotional stimulation-one should be motivated to learn and in a supportive environment.

Table 1 provides a summary description of the seven processes. Each process is presented in terms of a question that language learners ask and answer as they attempt to self direct their learning. The questions focus on different dimensions of a language learning experience learners say they attend to. The answer to the question represents an assessment and/or action-decision learners make about what they say they attend to. Of

course, the question, which I am using as a device to explain the processes, may never be consciously alluded to by the learners as such. The interviews indicated, however, that assessments and/or action-decisions are available to consciousness.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.

To illustrate briefly what the table refers to, let us consider learners who read the New York Times daily. In order to help themselves understand, they look up what they judge to be the key words and then guess at the meaning (coping). While reading they may notice a familiar word that seems to be used in a different context and realize that it has a second meaning (designating). After reading one half hour, they realize that they have understood only about 50% of what they have read (discriminating) and conclude that they are not learning very much about the language in this way (evaluating). After some reflection, however, they decide that they would like to be able to read the Times with facility and plan to ask an American friend for help on a regular basis (planning). Learners may further realize that their decision to persist despite the difficulty is due to the fact that they like challenges (self analysing). Moreover, they are convinced that the best way to learn is to take advantage of all possible opportunities to learn (theorizing).

The purpose of this study was to discover and describe how adults represent their endeavors to self direct their learning of a second language in a variety of social settings. Pointing to what learners become aware of and to the assessments and decisions they make, the seven processes described above provide us with a mentalistic view of self direction. The processes also expand upon what previous research has documented about learning and communication strategies(s) and self directed learning . In other words, while two of the processes point to phenomena already investigated by the research on learning and communication strategies (coping) and self directed learning (planning), the other five refer to dimensions of learners' conscious enterprises that have not yet been fully investigated (on the basis of learner self reports). Thus, the seven processes of self direction broaden our understanding of what learners do when they consciously intervene in their learning.

Using the processes as a classification scheme or framework, more groups, similar to and distinct from the group that constituted the research population of this study, should be studied to verify that the present framework is representative and comprehensive of what learners do to self direct (intervene in) their learning. As more groups of learners are studied, strategies(S), i.e. those that characterize learners'

overall approach to the task of language learning, could be described in terms of the processes. The learners in this study, for example, discriminated twice as often as they theorized, evaluated, coped or self analysed AND five times as often as they designated and planned. Groups of effective and ineffective learners could be studied to determine whether (1) a particular strategy(S) typifies each group; (2) the strategy(S) in itself is not significant but the variety with which or the manner in which learners report engaging in the processes that determines effectiveness of learning; (3) it is a combination of all these factors that results in effective or ineffective learning. Additional research should also enable us to further our understanding of the processes. Are some more important than others and why ?

Assuming that one is able to determine that there is a relationship between self directing learning and effective learning and that the specific factors that make for effective learning can be identified, these answers would provide the basis for a systematic approach to learner training. In other words, this study has pointed out that as students learn another language, they are involved both in directing the learning process AND in acquiring the skills and linguistic knowledge necessary to be competent in the language. It seems to me, therefore, that one of the tasks of teachers of second languages is

to provide their students with the opportunity to reflect upon, critique and refine their own conscious enterprises (i.e. the processes of self direction) so that they may assume a more active and, hopefully, more effective role in the learning and acquisition of their second language.

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Appendix A
Questions Given to Interviewees

Dear Interviewee;
Here are some questions to think about before you come to the interview. I may not ask all of them, but thinking about them will be a good way to prepare. Don't worry if you think you don't have an answer for all of them.

1. Did you study English before coming to the US ?
   Did you feel the method the teacher used was a good one ?
   Do you feel you learned English with her/him ? Why ?
2. Do you find learning English here different from learning English in your country ? Why ?
3. Do you feel you have made any improvement since your arrival ? Why ? Why not ?
4. During the week, when/where do you usually use English ?
   Do you sometimes think of using these situations to improve your English ?
5. Have you developed any ways to help yourself understand when people are using English ?
6. Before speaking English, some people think carefully of what they're going to say. Others do not think so carefully.
   What do you do ?
7. When you are using English , do you sometimes feel that people don't understand you ? What do you do about it ?

Appendix B
Sample Grid of Daily Activities

Interviewees are asked to indicate where they are and what language they are using on each day of a typical week. On the grid I actually used, time extended until 5 PM.

TIME	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
9 AM place language							
10 AM place language							
11 AM place language							
NOON place language							

APPENDIX C
Interview Schedule

The interview was divided into three parts. The objectives of Part I were (1) to help the interviewees feel at ease (2) to help them gain confidence in their ability as interviewees (3) to provide them with some practice in talking about their language learning. Questions focused on areas language learners generally talk about quite readily:

(1) why they came to the US and when

(2) what their reaction to living in a new culture and to hearing a new language was

(3) their previous language learning experience, in their country or elsewhere when applicable

In the second part of the interview, learners were asked (1) to examine their Grid of Daily Activities for the situations when they usually used English throughout the week (2) to choose from among these, the situations they preferred to discuss (3) to retrospect about each situation to discover whether and how they helped themselves learn in each one. Questions focused on the following areas:

(1) resources of learning utilized by the interviewees
(2) their intent in utilizing these resources
(3) the manner in which they exploited these resources
  (a) strategies for production
  (b) strategies for comprehension
  (c) strategies for dealing errors
  (d) strategies for dealing with native language
  (e) aspects of language noticed by learner
(4) their feelings and reasons for them
(5) the extent to which the situation facilitated learning & why

The last part of the interview verified the accuracy and completeness of the data provided in Part II. The specific objectives were (1) to have the interviewees make an overall assessment of their language learning experience (2) to test the reliability of some of the views expressed in Part II. Questions focused on the following topics:

(1) what the interviewees considered their best learning experience to have been and why

(2) whether or not they were satisfied with their progress to date and why

(3) what they would tell a friend who asks for advice about learning English in New York

(4) whether or not they felt they had changed because of their language learning experience

(5) whether they had a theory about learning a second

language and if so what it was

(6)why they had chosen to participate in the interview

APPENDIX D
Profile of Four Learners

MG, a business professional in his late twenties, came from Spain. This was his second visit to the US specifically to learn and improve his English. He had also spent a summer in England studying the language. The activities he engaged in were chosen, primarily, to learn the language although he maintained that while engaged in communication, he did not focus on form. He had completed most of the work for his Master's Degree except the thesis, which he was writing in English--to practice. He said he was learning English "the natural way".

EJ, a Korean woman also in her late twenties, had come to the US with her husband who was already enrolled in a graduate program. After receiving her BA degree (in Korea) she had continued to devise activities to learn English on her own. When she came to the US she enrolled in a formal English program partly because her husband was studying and she felt she should do so as well, and partly because she was planning to enroll in a graduate program in psychology. Unlike MG, she felt that grammar and vocabulary were fundamental to the learning English and so tended to concentrate her efforts on acquiring knowledge in these two areas.

CD, a Brazilian social worker in her middle thirties, had come to the US to do graduate work. When she arrived, she knew very little English and so enrolled in a class for beginning students. After about 35 weeks of intensive language study, she became a full time student in the Department of Social Work--although she had been either auditing or taking courses all the time that she was studying language. CD stressed the importance of the affective in learning.

LS, a Hungarian in his mid twenties, had immigrated to the US. He had not had any formal training in English in his country, but he was able to describe in great detail the learning endeavors he organized to help himself learn English--at a time when he did not plan to come to the US. Unlike the others, he had not gone on to college after high school. LS emphasized the need to be always open to opportunities to learn.

TABLE 1

THE PROCESSES OF SELF DIRECTED LEARNING

PROCESS	DIMENSION OF LEARNING EXPERIENCE	ASSESSMENT/ACTION-DECISION
COPING How do I fill this need ?	learning or communication need	Learners select and perform tasks.
DESIGNATING How does this language work ?	the language	Learners make judgments about the linguistic and sociolinguistic codes.
DISCRIMINATING How am I doing ?	learner's performance	Learners assess their performance.
EVALUATING Have I learned from this activity ?	outcome of a learning activity	Learners determine whether they have learned or not.
PLANNING What do I want to learn and how ?	objectives and resources	Learners choose their linguistic objectives and the resources to achieve them.
SELF ANALYSING How am I responsible for my learning ?How is language learning affecting me ?	the learner	Learners assess how they influence their learning process and how they are affected by it.
THEORIZING Why have I (not) learned ? What's it like to learn a language ?	the learning process	Learners make judgments about how to learn a language and about what language learning is like.